

異世界

居酒屋

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Kadokawa Comics A
isekai izakaya
"NOBU"

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Chapter 33: The Old Man and the Fish (Part 1)

A long time had passed since Johann Gustav had visited this store. If he remembered correctly, it had still been winter during his previous visit. It was fortunate that they had come to this store when he brought his selfish niece out to make some good memories in the town before her marriage.

「Johann Gustav, is it this store?」

「Yes, dear uncle. It looks like quite an interesting store, doesn't it?」

Johann Gustav had brought a companion with him this evening. His companion was not as difficult to handle as his niece was, but he was still quite a challenge. Johann Gustav could not even imagine what this robust, silver-haired uncle would eat at this store.

The early summer's sunlight still shone, even though it was dusk, making his forehead drip with sweat.

He had brought his uncle along to this interesting store, which he had just remembered, on such a day in order to enjoy the cool breeze and drink.

「Excuse me.」

「Welcome!」

「...elcome.」

When the glass door was pulled open, a cool chill and a lively voice greeted them from within the store. The shop had been warmer when he came during the winter. Was it due to some kind of device?

「It's fairly empty today, isn't it?」

Johann Gustav asked the waitress as he guided his uncle towards the seats by the counter. He thought that there would be more customers in the store, but it seemed that it was his lucky day today, and he was grateful for it.

「Since the previously mentioned conference is going to be held the day after tomorrow, the whole town is feeling tense.」

「I see.」

He already knew about the meeting.

There would be a small conference held in the Old Capital in two days.

The representatives of the three northern territories, who did not even bother to hide their intention of breaking away from the Empire, would meet the Empire's representative here.

Although there was an incident in the Old Capital regarding the City Council's chairman, Bachschouf, being dismissed just before the conference, thanks to the efforts of the Council's other members, they managed to hold the meeting safely.

The Empire had a policy to prevent anyone from withdrawing, but it seemed that the other side had taken the Empire lightly and had called them an old pig. Johann Gustav had heard that the conference was expected to be a difficult one.

「It is a disaster for this store, huh.」

「That is not true, you know. Even though we would be troubled if this slow period continues for a long time, we can still properly serve the customers who come in on such days.」

The waitress replied with a smile as she served the appetizer. It was a small bowl containing some kind of fish.

「Oh, is this herring?」

The uncle asked as he peeked into the unusual, small bowl.

「No, that's not herring. It's *koaji no nanbanzuke*.」

(TL: *koaji*: small horse mackerel, *nanbanzuke*: fried fish marinated in vinegar)



「*Nanbanzuke*, you say. Yet another dish I have not heard about.」

「It is fried small horse mackerel that has been dipped into a sweet-and-sour sauce. Since it would be too hot to serve when it is freshly fried, I have served one that was pickled beforehand.」

「I see.」

His uncle became interested and brought a piece to his mouth with his fork. Johann Gustav copied him and followed after him.

One might say it was sour, but it was not sour to the point that it became unpleasant.

There was a refreshing sweet and sour taste, which was followed by a subtle spiciness. After that, the taste of the fish would spread in the mouth. It was delicious.

Johann Gustav, who was a noble, took pride in having tasted a variety of dishes, and he figured that only a select few people from the Eastern Kingdom could cook a recipe with such delicate flavours.

「This is really good, Johann Gustav.」

「Yes, dear uncle. This sour taste is wonderful. Even though my appetite had decreased during the summer, it seems I was able to eat this.」

「Indeed. But, I wonder, what is this subtle spicy flavour that is responsible for enhancing the sourness?」

His uncle used his fork and took out a small, red, rounded object hidden in the small bowl.

It certainly looked spicy, based on its appearance.

「That is correct. That is *takanotsume*, a kind of seasoning. Its spiciness was used in this dish to enhance the flavour.」

(TL note: *takanotsume*: red pepper)

Johann Gustav and his uncle looked at one another after listening to the waitress's explanation.

「*Takanotsume*, you say? It is a suitable seasoning for my uncle, isn't it?」

「Indeed, Johann Gustav. This is a good sign, I suppose.」

His uncle slightly cleared his throat as the waitress, who did not understand, looked on with a smile.

「By the way, ojou-san. I'm sorry, but this *nanbanzuke*, I mean, I think this will really go well with my choice of liquor.」

「Sure! What would you like?」

「Is the ale here good, Johann Gustav?」

「When I came here in the past, it was called 'Toriaezu Nama'」

When he spoke out that name, the waitress, the store owner, and even the dishwasher girl all showed apologetic expressions.

「I'm sorry, honoured guest. We do not serve 'Toriaezu Nama' anymore.」

Even though the store owner bowed, the uncle was not one to give up so easily.

「That's regrettable. I have come to this store tonight in order to drink this 'Toriaezu Nama', you know. Could you please make an exception for me?」

「I've heard about the incident with Bachschouf. However, if there is still some in stock, is it possible to let my dear uncle drink it?」

The waitress and the store owner looked at each other and nodded. It was something they both agreed on. The waitress immediately vanished behind the counter.

「Specially for today.」

Shinobu brought out an ordinary mug filled with a golden liquid. The uncle, who was attentive to details, looked at the foam with his pointed eyes. After observing it for a while, the uncle rubbed his palms together as he faced the mug.

「Now then, excuse me.」

With a gulping sound, the mug's golden liquid smoothly flowed into his stomach. One would never have thought that this drinking man was 78 years old this year.

Johann Gustav followed suit. He was not able to savour it properly when he had

previously brought Hildegarde, but now that he drank it again, he could tell that the taste was a masterpiece.

The uncle placed the mug down with a clang, and suddenly bursted into laughter.

His uncle had not laughed this much in a long time. In fact, it was so intense that it could be called a guffaw.

「Johann Gustav! It's a masterpiece! This thing is a masterpiece!」

「So, what do you say?」

「Did you say there was a bastard who suspected that this was lager?」

「Yes, I heard it from Baron Branton.」

Baron Branton, who owned a territory near the Old Capital, was obsessed with this incident and had made an appeal to the Imperial Diet to withdraw the imperial edict regarding the time limit of the prohibition of the circulation of lager.

Who would have thought that such a haughty, tall man would move for a mere pub? It became the topic of conversation amongst the upper class society for a while, since the reasons for his actions were unknown.

「I do not know whether that guilty bastard has actually drunk lager before, but this is definitely not the “lager which is not allowed to be traded by law”. I can testify for that.」

「So, this is ale then?」

「No. It is probably lager. However, the taste is different from the one made by the alcohol brewing company in the Imperial Capital. The other side tasted strong, but this has a crisp taste, which is better.」

「I see.」

「If there are lagers that have already been made in other places, then that edict is meaningless. I see even the Branton can sometimes say something smart.」

The uncle cheerfully asked for another cup. In addition, the appetizer was also replaced.

This *nanbanzuke* paired well with lager.

Johann Gustav wanted to make it at home, so he tried to memorize the taste and appearance of the dish as much as possible before leaving.

「Now then, dear customer, what main course would you like to order?」

「Oh right. Then, I would like to have fish. An exceptionally delicious one would be nice.」

Chapter 34: The Old Man and the Fish (Part 2)

A plate of a slender fish, which looked baked well-seasoned, was served. Johann Gustav was intrigued to see dried fish, which was commonplace, being served in this store.

The uncle had a different expression, and picked up the fork as he smiled.

「This is sardine *shoyuyaki*.」 (TL: shoyuyaki: broiled in soy sauce)



Even though he had never heard of sardine, the saltiness had soaked into it properly and tasted delicious. The taste might not pair well with ale or lager, but it stimulated his appetite.

「The *nanbanzuke* from before was pretty good, but I like this better. It has a rustic beauty, or rather, it is like you are eating in a fishing village. It has that kind of simplicity.」

「Dear uncle, have you been to a fishing village before?」

「I was brought up near the sea before I joined my son-in-law's family.」

「The flavours of the food in the fishing village were also stronger.」 The uncle

continued.

「You sweat when you move your body. We sweated a lot while we were hunting, you know. It was to the extent that when it dried, you could blow salt off. You come to crave salty food when you have sweated that much.」

Johann Gustav, who was also eating the sardine, was surprised when he saw that his uncle had even devoured the bones with a voracious appetite. The culture was different, so the meals were completely different from the ones served in the imperial court and nobles' feasts.

「When the place changes, the food changes as well. The Empire is huge. The bread that we normally eat is made from wheat, but I heard that they mix it with barley in places north of the Old Capital. They do that in the territories that the Empire is negotiating with.」

「I don't understand. Why can't everybody eat the same thing?」

「Don't be foolish. That would only be possible for a kingdom. The Empire, on the other hand, must have the capacity to cover the daily necessities of all the different people, including food and clothing. If one cannot do that, then they shouldn't call themselves an Empire.」

Even though Johann Gustav was a noble, from time to time, he could not understand his uncle's advanced explanations. At this moment, he had to be careful with what he said, in order to ensure that his uncle did not get angry.

「Coming up, fried horse mackerel. Please pour the sauce over it before eating.」



It was not the waitress from before who served the dish. Instead, it was the dishwasher girl. She was quite an adorable girl who, unlike the other two employees, looked like a native of the Empire.

「Do I pour the sauce myself? This is another interesting idea.」

The uncle poured the sauce, which was like a pitch-black coating, over the dish.

However, the crispiness from the frying could still be seen.

「So, do you cut this with a knife and fork?」

When Johann Gustav asked the girl who had carried the dish, she replied with a laugh.

「It's no good to eat fried mackerel in a well-mannered way. The secret to eating it deliciously is to eat it messily, in one gulp.」

The uncle, who heard it, became delighted and put his knife down.

「Eat it messily, you say. I have not done that in such a long time.」

Johann Gustav stabbed the fried mackerel with his fork and timidly brought it

to his mouth.

The thick sauce coating, which had a hint of sourness, was strong and matched really well with the mildly flavoured mackerel.

「This goes well with the lager, dear uncle.」

「Yes, this is delicious! It is definitely a taste you would not be able to enjoy if you had cut it up elegantly.」

The uncle had another serving of lager, after which he wolfed down two more pieces of mackerel, which were served to each of them.

「By the way, Johann Gustav, it is a fact that people of the three northern territories still eat with their hands.」

「Yes, one of the rulers of the three territories, Earl Wyndelmarc, was ridiculed for it during the dinner party at the Imperial Capital and got really angry.」

「It was due to all the small things that have piled up, I suppose.」

It seemed that the current Emperor was trying to suppress the independence of the three territories without letting them speak, but was that the correct choice? Johann Gustav felt that the Emperor's policies were strangely wrong after talking to his uncle.

Of course, as a noble, he would reject the recognition of independence. If one was approved, more would follow. This matter should not be overlooked, since this concerned the dignity of the Empire.

While he was thinking such things, the next dish was carried out. The little girl from before was carrying it, but it seemed that the plate was a little too big.

「*Karei no nitsuke...kyaa!*」

(TL: *karei*: righteye flounder, *nitsuke*: boiled. basically boiled flounder, but the uncle speaks of “*karei*” a few times so I had to leave this in.)



The plate was too big after all. The girl tripped, and the plate with the splendid fish fell onto the floor.

Fortunately, the plate had not broken, but the fish was ruined.

It was a little regretful, seeing as it had looked like a fine dish.

「I...I'm very sorry! Are you injured anywhere?」

The uncle smiled gently at the girl, who was apologizing in a panic, and took out his handkerchief to wipe her face and hands.

「I'm alright. My clothes don't look dirty either. Leaving that aside, is the little ojou-san alright?」

「Y, yes!」

「It's not good if you burn yourself. I will give this handkerchief to you, please cool it with water immediately.」

「Thank you very much!」

The store owner and the waitress from a while ago also appeared and bowed as well. The waitress immediately joined the girl in cleaning up the floor.

It is true that the girl had failed, but the treatment she received was not cruel. If it were an ordinary izakaya, such reactions would be unlikely.

「But, this fish called 'karei' became a waste.」

The uncle muttered regretfully.

It was probably reasonable, since his uncle could not obtain fish where he lived.

「I am really sorry.」

The store owner bowed and apologised politely. It was all fish. It was likely that the customer had assumed this was the main dish.

「No, it's okay. I am satisfied just knowing that there is a store that can serve fish in the Old Capital.」

「Ah, that's not it. It's because the *karei* for the second person will be served a little late.」

「What do you mean?」

He did not completely understand the store owner's words, but his doubts were washed away when the waitress brought out another plate. The *karei*, which was as big as the one before, was brought out perfectly.

「I will prepare the other one immediately.」

「A, Ah, no. It's fine. I will split this *karei* with Johann Gustav.」

「Is that so? I understand.」

Did they have so much fish that they could prepare another one? Even though it was unbelievable, there was a real *karei* right in front of his eyes.

Johann Gustav's opinion of Izakaya Nobu became even better.

However, the uncle, who had some *karei* in his mouth, seemed to be thinking about something else.

When he was deep in thoughts like this, it made Johann Gustav recall his wisdom when he had been on active duty, before he retired.

「The last dish for today is salmon *ochazuke*.」

(TL: *ochazuke*: rice in green tea)



The dish that was introduced and served to them was a bowl of rice with a red fish placed on top of it and soup.

「Is this fish...salmon?」

「Dear uncle, do you know about this?」

「Yes. During winter, it would swim upstream, north of the northern three territories. Its salted products were widely distributed. I've eaten it before, when I was very young.」

The uncle, who inserted his wooden spoon into the *chazuke*, seemed disappointed as he talked about it.

「Ah, the skin is not included?」

The waitress, who heard his excessively despondent monologue, panicked and answered.

「It is alright! The skin was peeled off, and not thrown it away! It is now being lightly grilled!」

The store owner heated up the salmon skin on the grill net at those words. An incomparable fragrance tickled their nostrils.

「Do you like salmon skin too, dear customer?」

「Of course. Do you like it too, ojou-san?」

「Yes, it's my favourite.」

Johann Gustav did not completely understand what salmon skin would taste like, but apparently, it was unbelievably delicious.

「When I was young, if you brought me a salmon skin as thick as my thumb, I would have done anything for it, no matter what the cost.」

「There you go again, with your exaggerations.」

「Luckily, no one ever showed up with a salmon skin, so I guess it was fine. No, I guess you could say it was a disappointment.」

After Johann finished his salmon *ochazuke*, he felt a pleasant drowsiness, and he watched his uncle eat the salmon skin with his liquor. Lately, he had been too busy to sleep well.

「It looks like you're sleepy, Johann Gustav. Should we retire for the day?」

「Thank you very much for coming today. We look forward to your next visit.」

The uncle beamed with joy at the waitress's polite manners.

「Thank you for your offer, but I live a little too far away. However, if I have the chance to do so next time, I will drop by.」

「Thank you very much.」

「Same here. I'm glad I could eat delicious salmon skin here.」

It had been dusk when they entered the store, but now there were stars twinkling in the sky of the Old Capital.

As he made his way back to the inn, the uncle quickly issued orders to the assembled Imperial Guards and his steward.

「I want to change the contents of the dishes served for the conference that will be held the day after tomorrow. It is sudden, but please arrange it without fail.」

Chapter 35: Details of the Three Northern Territories Conference (Part 1)

Gernot ducked under the shop's curtain and ordered a 'Toriaezu Nama'. Regarding the lager incident, they had been given a warning notice of a temporary ban on 'Toriaezu Nama', due to the confusion it had caused. Gernot had been the one to tell them.

He informed the surprised Taisho and Shinobu of it with his usual sullen face.

「It has been decided that, starting today, lager circulation will be permitted.」

「Is that so?!」

「No one will be punished for drinking lager anymore in the entirety of the Empire. Of course, I believe that this 'Toriaezu Nama' is not lager.」

Initially, the law was supposed to expire after 30 years.

Gernot figured that it would be a problem if the statute stayed in place.

Of course, even though it was an unreasonable law, the captured offenders would be fined heavily, and the lager would be confiscated. This was Gernot's job, the purpose of his work.

In fact, most of Bachschouf's personal assets had already been confiscated by the city council, and his firm was also in decline.

Although the whereabouts of Bachschouf's attendant, Damien, were unknown, Gernot didn't consider it a big issue. Even if one of the small fries had escaped, it wasn't a serious problem.

Everything was over, and the Old Capital had made a profit. Wasn't it a wonderful thing?

Today's appetizer was small horse mackerel nanbanzuke.

The harmony between the sweet, the sour, and the subtle spiciness was simply splendid.

However, the refined Gernot, with his sensitive tongue, could tell that the dish had only been simmered for a short time.

If it had been allowed to simmer for a few days, even members of royalty or

nobility would be left moaning over the exquisite taste of the dish.

「At any rate, thank you very much, Gernot-san.」

「Is it about Bachschouf's case? It's alright even if you don't thank me. I was just doing my job as a tax collector.」

Though, it would be a lie if he said he wasn't really angry at Bachschouf. That man had hired someone to defend his firm and had tried to evade tax collection.

The City Council's Commerce Guild had outright opposed the collection of taxes, which was a conspiracy to suppress and lower the amount of tax collected. Behind the scenes, they were profiting from having a hand in smuggling prohibited items. It was an unforgivable act.

This incident was instigated by Bachschouf himself. Therefore, it could only be said that he had to bear all the consequences by himself. It had backfired on him when he had underestimated his opponent, believing it to merely be a dirty pub on the streets.

It was not something Gernot would've overlooked.

「Well, it might be childish for someone with the title of City Council member to turn down someone's gratitude for freeing them from their troubles.」

「What is it? If it is possible to be done in our store, we will do it.」

Gernot involuntarily cleared his throat at Shinobu's words.

「Anything, you say.」

「Y-yes, I did say that... But... 」

「Then, I would like to request something.」

Shinobu backed away, but did not mind his overwhelming vigour. How long had he been waiting for this day to come?

「...Napolitan. I want you to make it.」

「Eh?」

「Eh?」

「Eh?」

It wasn't just Shinobu. Even Taisho and Eva were staring in wonder. However, only Shinobu's reason for her surprise was different from the rest.

「What's wrong? Didn't you say you'll do anything as thanks? This Gernot, will not forget the Napolitan that I ate that day.」

「Wa-wa-wa!」

Taisho and Eva stared strangely at Shinobu, who was raising her voice and flailing her arms in panic. Even though his request was only to make that, what on earth had happened to make her so embarrassed?

「Shinobu-chan, would you rather that I cook the Napolitan?」

Shinobu had resigned herself towards Taisho, who asked suspiciously, and even added a suggestion.

「Ah, no, I mean, yes. Erm, please use good bacon in it, too.」

When Shinobu said the word 'bacon', Taisho's eyes narrowed. He looked like he was holding back his anger.

「... Good bacon, huh. Come to think of it, I had less bacon for my evening drink than normal sometimes. Shinobu-chan, you know something about it, right?」

「A, ahahaha... Let's talk about that later.」

Yes, that bacon was delicious.

Gernot couldn't deny that his drive to take down Bachschouf had stemmed from the thought of never being able to unite with the miracle, the Napolitan, again.

He had sent many letters urging the slow-moving alcohol brewing office, to the point that it became a nuisance. As a result, they had discovered that a total of 37 barrels had been smuggled out, so they had conversely sent a letter to thank him, leaving him unaware of what had happened.

「By the way, how did the conference go?」

Shinobu brought up the subject while waiting for the spaghetti to be thoroughly boiled.

She also held some interest regarding the conference with the Three Northern

Territories.

There were signs that the other customers in the store had pricked up their ears too, in order to listen in on the conversation.

Besides, there was no gag order that prevented people from spreading stories about what had happened in the conference, which had ended two days ago. Usually, Bachschouf and his cronies would have occasionally mixed in groundless rumours with the truth, but after that case, they had fallen silent. That was why there were many people who did not know about the incident yet.

「Ah, the conference the day before yesterday was amazing. I'm sure it will go down in history.」

Chapter 36: Details of the Three Northern Territories Conference (Part 2)

As expected, the conference began contentiously.

From the very beginning, the delegates of the Three Northern Territories had no intention of swearing fealty to the Empire.

However, it was still necessary to make preparations if they wanted to oppose the Empire. It was evident from their attitudes that they wanted to delay the onset of war until the farming season had ended.

「The discussion did not progress, and stalled all the way until the conference meal.」

「Was Gernot-san present as well?」

「The city council members were also invited to the conference meal. Hence, I was also present.」

「What kinds of dishes were served?」

Gernot made a slightly disappointed expression at Shinobu, who was very interested. In fact, those present from the Empire's side were also quite disappointed.

「It was... a very ordinary dish. There was barley bread, grilled salted fish, and meat that was still attached to the bones. Also, there were a lot of potatoes.」

「Aren't you supposed to serve a much more luxurious meal for a conference meal?」

「Normally, it is so. Especially since the previous Emperor, His Majesty, was the one hosting the conference meal this time. The participants were actually looking forward to a grand feast...」

「It was disappointing, huh?」

「That's right...」

After all, Eleonora from the Water Transportation Guild did not even touch the food on her plate. The other Council Members were also reluctantly eating

it.

「Then, wouldn't the people from the Northern Three Territories have been angered by such a dish?」

「On the contrary, the delegates, who had been stubborn throughout the meeting, were unusually open during the conference meal, and even started friendly conversations.」

「He~eh」

「It's all thanks to His Majesty, the previous Emperor.」

When the previous Emperor began to eat his meal with his hands during the conference meal, the participants from the Empire were shocked. It was believed that such a style of eating only belonged to the savage tribes of the North.

However, the previous Emperor, who held the highest position there, did it too. Hence, the others had no choice but to follow.

「Then, why was the conference meal carried out in the Northern Style?」

「That's because... It seems that it had made the delegates of the opposing side let their guard down.」

It was an interesting experience for Gernot as well.

The flat and hard baked bread was used as a plate, so it could be eaten too. When the bread was torn off and dipped into the soup, it would become softer and could be eaten that way.

「The conditions for withdrawing from the Empire were not discussed during the meeting, but during the conference meal.」

「Isn't that bad?」

「That is not so.」

The previous Emperor's plan was a success.

He had managed to make the savage tribes, who were angry at being made fun of continuously in the Imperial Capital, sit down at the negotiating table. However, it made it possible for the opponent to take advantage of the situation as well.

「The people of the Northern Tribes despise the Empire, likening it to an old pig. The conditions were extremely harsh as well. If the Empire accepted it as it was, they would have become a laughing stock with the Eastern Kingdom and the likes.」

「They were underestimating the Empire, huh.」

「Well, yeah.」

Taisho appeared from behind Shinobu, giving his feedback.

「I'm sorry to interrupt the climax of the story, but the Napolitan is ready.」

「Yes, yes, this is it! Can I have tobasco sauce and cheese too, please?」

「Gernot-san... is quite well-informed.」

That was obvious. He had dreamed about reuniting with this pasta for so long. Gourmets, including himself, were known to be attached to certain dishes. He had endured it for so long thus far, so this was like a reward for him. Anybody would jump at the chance.

Delicious!

He almost leapt out of his seat and cried out from its deliciousness the moment he took a bite. It took all of Gernot's self control as a prided City Council member not to do so.

Even though it was slightly different from Shinobu's, the deliciousness of the Napolitan still reigned supreme. In other words, it was the pinnacle of flavour.

Gernot devoured it greedily, not minding that his mouth was getting dirtied. 'Ah, I should've asked for two, no, three servings,' he thought. Moreover, it would be such a shame if he did not fill up his belly with this heavenly food.

Would it be enough to stop with just this much?

His craving for Napolitan was what motivated him to live on till the next day. Even now, Gernot still thought so.

For the past few months, he had continuously searched for a substitute for Napolitan, through trial-and-error, day after day. His only solace had been his desire for eel bento.

However, it was still not the same. No matter how hard he had searched, there wasn't any food that was comparable to Napolitan.

Therefore, he almost danced for joy in his heart when he was assigned the Bachschouf case.

This way, he could legitimately order Napolitan without seeming unnatural. He no longer felt bitter about sending letters repeatedly to the nasty alcohol brewing office in order to find a solution. Everything was done for the sake of Napolitan.

Gernot was attacked by a feeling of dreadful desolation when he had devoured everything in the blink of an eye. The blissful encounter was over, and all that was left was the empty plate.

He felt guilty when he realised he was wishing for a second or third Bachschouf to appear.

「Oh, Gernot-san, if you liked Napolitan so much, we can always make it for you anytime, you know?」

「Is... Is that true, Taisho-san?!」

「Y-yes. But it'll be impossible when we're busy.」

「That's not a lie, right? You wouldn't lie to a tax collector just to gain benefits, right?」

「It's not a lie, yes.」

Gernot looked around after saying so and coughed lightly.

「W-well, this Napolitan is quite delicious. If I pass by Nobu sometime, I'll order it.」

While Gernot was making a little excuse for himself, Eva quietly handed him a handkerchief.

「Gernot-san, your mouth is dirty, you know.」

「Ah, thank you. Such a considerate girl.」

「Ah, well. So then, what happened to the conference after that?」

Gernot resumed his story after being urged on by Eva.

「The conditions demanded by the delegates from the Three Northern Territories were harsh. Every year, the Empire has to pay the Three Northern Territories reparations for being in charge of defending the borders with gold coins.」

「That would be a question of honour, huh.」

Shinobu gave an understanding look, and nodded in agreement. It seemed that this girl might be surprisingly worldly.

「When it seemed that they had begun to open up after much trouble during the conference meal, the main meat dish was brought out at the previous Emperor's command.」

「Main course?」

「Yes, it was a whole roasted calf.」

According to the ancient Northern traditions, the leader would carve the cow and serve it to his people.

It was an important ritual for the prideful Northern warriors, as it clarified who was the leader of the many tribes in the North.

「Did the previous Emperor arrange it to display it to the North?」

「I thought so as well. Even the Northern delegates probably thought so. However, an accident happened.」

「Accident?」

「The calf was too heavy, and that the bearer dropped it midway.」

「What a waste...」

「Everyone felt sorry about the calf too. Even the delegates from the North, who were supposed to be hostile, leaked out a sigh. But...」

「But?」

「Another calf was brought out at the previous Emperor's command.」

Everyone who was at the conference meal was surprised by it. The calf from before was splendid, but this other calf was even more splendid. If you thought about it later, it was probably a planned strategy from the very

beginning, but no one was able to say anything at that time, while they were looking at that magnificent beast.

「When the previous Emperor carved the calf, the delegates from the North became meek. They were probably awed by the bottomless assets of the Empire they despised so much.」

Gernot had thought that Shinobu and Taisho would be surprised by the story, but their reactions were dull. When he looked at them properly, both of them were looking at Eva for some reason.

「Don't you think it's amazing? With the previous Emperor, His Majesty's wits, the crisis regarding the withdrawal of the Three Northern Territories was avoided.」

「E-eh, it's amazing, I think.」

For some reason, they were focusing their attention on Eva, who was looking at the handkerchief in Gernot's hands with a stiff smile.

「Is there something wrong with this handkerchief? It seems to be made from very good silk, but...」

At that moment, Gernot's expression froze.
The silk-woven handkerchief was pure white except for its four corners, where a crest was embroidered onto it.

「Now then, a three-headed dragon and a hawk's talon crest...」

Only a single person among all the royalty and nobility in the whole continent was permitted to use this crest. That person, who was from the House of the Prideful Hawk, entered his son-in-law's family, the Imperial House of the Three Headed Dragon.

「Th...this is the previous emperor's crest...」

He had wiped his mouth with a handkerchief that contained the previous Emperor's crest.

It was a rare experience that couldn't be experienced by other people, but Gernot, who had a renewed sense of admiration towards the Imperial Family after this case, almost fainted after finding out.

「E-Eva-dono. I'll wash this handkerchief and return it! I'll surely return it!」

「Do, *dono*? Ah, yes, please return it if you can...」

Gernot unconsciously handed over the payment from his wallet, and rushed out of Izakaya, leaving it behind. Gernot believed that Nobu might have connections, since the lifting of the ban on lager had happened at a strange time.

「Wh-what a frightening store.」

‘I'll never demand an unreasonable tax from this store.’

Gernot swore it on his life.

Chapter 37: An End With Salmon Ochazuke (Vol.1 LN Epilogue)

The tables and the counter were wiped beautifully clean with a piece of cloth dampened with vinegar.

Even though Nobuyuki normally left this type of work to Shinobu or Eva, it was his habit to clean it at least once a week.

Today was the Sabbath for the Old Capital. Although it was morning, nobody was on the streets. According to the religion that was widely practiced in the Old Capital, people believed that it was a good day to not work. Even though Nobuyuki could open the store, no customers would come.

It was an experience for family members to cherish this day, as it was the only time they could spend together in the entire week.

As a matter of fact, ever since the store had opened that day, Deacon Edwin had been the only customer, so there was hardly any business.

Lastly, Nobuyuki purified the altar and replaced the water of the *sakaki* plant. Ever since the day Eva had disappeared, he had started to offer inari sushi at the altar once a week. Although he did not understand the meaning behind it, he had a feeling that business had begun to flourish, so it was a small price to pay.

(TL: *Sakaki*: evergreen tree. *Cleyera japonica*)

Speaking of “Inari”, the store itself is a mystery. The entrance of this store, which was located in the corner of a shopping district that had a bad reputation, was somehow connected to the Old Capital. It was possible to enter the store from the shopping district side by opening the front shutters, but when they wanted to exit the store, it would be connected to the Old Capital.

(TL: Inari in this context means God of Harvest, Uka-no-Mitama)

Due to Nobuyuki and Shinobu’s easygoing nature, they did not mind the small details, and the landlord had kept silent too. The monthly rent was paid through

bank transactions, since the landlord, who lived in the nearby Inari shrine, never came to visit the store.

Even though Nobuyuki visited the Inari shrine occasionally, it wasn't merely for a stroll.

When he had been in deep trouble, it was this Inari shrine that had helped him.

「Now then, is it about time to get ready?」

He was done with his routine cleaning on the Sabbath.

After this, he would normally go to his own room on the second floor and watch his pre-recorded detective dramas, assemble a plastic model of a ship in a bottle, or eat out on the pretence of research.

However, today was different. There would be a special customer arriving.

He changed out of his work clothes that he had worn during his cleaning and donned his chef clothes.

It was one of the special skills Nobuyuki had obtained during his pursuit of knowledge; he could feel calm and clear his mind whenever he put on his white chef's hat.

He had just finished sterilizing his kitchen knife and other preparations when he heard a noise coming from the back door

「...elcome.」

「Hello...」

Shinobu entered shyly.

She was wearing a refreshing sundress with a thin jacket, which gave off an entirely different impression from her usual apron work attire.

She entered the store, passing behind Nobuyuki, and sat down at the counter. She had settled down, but her behaviour was different from usual.

「Taisho, I'm sorry for asking for such a big favour today」

「It's alright. Since it's an anniversary.」

Today, exactly half a year had passed since Izakaya Nobu opened in the Old Capital.

It had been cold and snowy, with flickers of sunlight, when the store had

opened on that day in the Old Capital, but right now, it was hot enough for one to actually break a sweat.

Two glasses, not mugs, were filled with beer. When Nobuyuki handed the glass, which looked like it was covered in sweat, to Shinobu, he was surprised to see that her fingers were longer and thinner than he had expected.

「Cheers.」

「... Cheers.」

Even though Nobuyuki had only intended to take a sip, it seemed that he was thirsty. He made a bitter smile after he had had unintentionally drained his glass.

Although Shinobu had practically no makeup on when she ate, her skin looked vibrant. No, did she just lack an interest in makeup?

「Speaking of beer, a lot has happened, hasn't it?」

「Indeed. That Bachschouf case.」

「Yes, yes, Bachschouf, if I remember correctly.」

Nobuyuki served the appetizer that he had prepared to Shinobu, who was holding the glass in one hand and laughing mirthfully. It was possible to serve sashimi, which was not a familiar dish to the people of the Old Capital yet, without reserve today.

He watched as Shinobu savoured the food quietly.

Shinobu, who had been strictly disciplined as a daughter of a ryotei, had a beautiful way of eating.

Furthermore, her tongue was the real deal.

(ED: In this case, i think it refers to Shinobu's refined sense of taste)

「Taisho, did your skills improve again?」

「Did it? If Shinobu-chan says so, then it must be so.」

「I think it's tailored more towards the customer's tastes now, compared to before.」

「The customer's tastes, huh?」

It had been about nine months since Shinobu ran away from home and fled from the ryotei with him.

It wasn't something romantic like eloping, though.

It was more like two people had escaped separately, but acted on it at the same time by chance.

It seemed that the reason Shinobu ran away from her family was because she had to marry against her will.

It was just for formalities, but there were plans to arrange a marriage interview with the son of the vice president of a bank in order to rebuild the ryotei, which was in a bad financial situation.

Based on her personality, he could understand why Shinobu left that detestable house.

「Taisho, I...want to eat tempura.」

「Okay okay. I'll fry whatever you want.」

Since the last resort of having Shinobu marry to rebuild the ryotei was called off, it was necessary to begin restructuring its employees, after looking at the current situation.

Even though Nobuyuki took pride in his cooking skills, socializing was not one of his strong points. If he was going to be fired, he thought that he might as well leave the store immediately. Then he had unexpectedly met Shinobu-ojousama again.

Shinobu sprinkled some salt over the crisply fried tempura and mixed it evenly. Shinobu's favourites were whiting, maitake mushrooms, edible chrysanthemum, and squid. She was also a fan of unusual things like benishoga tempura.

(TL: benishoga: red pickled ginger)

「This squid is delicious.」

「If it's this delicious squid, Berthold-san might even be able to eat it, right?」

「I don't think he has overcome his fear enough yet.」

He served a second glass of beer when Shinobu picked up the extra crispy fried squid.

In his opinion, it was well-fried.

Her face seemed a little flushed. Had she become tipsy?

From that point on, he made various appetizers as per Shinobu's requests. He served items that were difficult to serve out in the Old Capital. By adding a little twist, he even served dishes that could be made in the Old Capital. He even redesigned some of the Old Capital's dishes.

Every time a piece was served, Shinobu's merciless criticism came flying out, and she excitedly talked about the regulars she wanted to serve it to. It wasn't bad to have rest days like this.

Finally, the last dish was salmon ochazuke for two people. Although they weren't aware of it, this was the dish that the previous Emperor had eaten. They ate it as if they were drinking it. It smoothly filled up the stomach and gave a pleasant, satisfying feeling.

「Hey, Nobuyuki-san」

「Hm?」

「Let's continue it, this Izakaya Nobu.」

「Ah...that's right.」

Somewhere close by, they heard the faint sounds of cicadas chirping. Midsummer was almost upon them.



(TL note: Don't worry, readers. This is not the last chapter of the WN. It is, however, the last chapter on Isekai Izakaya Nobu's LN volume 1. Hence, the title. Thank you for showing your support of my translations all this while. Here's to more chapters to come. Cheers!)

Chapter 38: The Female Mercenary (Part 1)

As she rested, she looked up at the blue sky and saw a pair of black kite birds. Leontaine du Louve sat on her armor chest and wiped the sweat off of her forehead.

The sun shone on the wheat fields on the hillside, giving the waves of grain an amber hue. Castle walls towered over the other side, where the Old Capital, the most strategic location in the northern part of the Empire, was situated.

Leontaine had some confidence in her physical strength, despite being a woman, but she was really exhausted because of an incident that had happened in the last few days.

Everything had been going well until she had been attacked by three bandits. She had managed to chase them away with her trusty beloved sword, but the problem was that her horse had run away during the commotion.

It wasn't possible to throw away her ancestral suit of armour, so she could only tie a hemp rope to the armor chest and advance westward along the highway, for the time being. Although she had passed by a carriage along the way, the carriage was already packed with luggage, so they didn't have any room to spare for a single frail woman, who would become a burden, and her armor chest on the carriage.

Leontaine continued walking throughout the night, resenting the narrow-minded Imperial people who disdained others, before she finally reached a hill where she could see the Old Capital.

Even though there was nothing she could do about the heat and humidity, the gentle breeze was comfortable.

Leontaine unintentionally recalled the beaches back in her hometown in the Eastern Kingdom as the wind caressed her now loosened cheeks.

It was ridiculous to set up camp when the castle walls were already in sight. The female mercenary got up with one last burst of energy. She wanted to sleep in the bed of an inn tonight.

The sun had begun to set when she finally reached the east gate of the Old Capital.

The gatekeeper, who sported a short moustache, grew suspicious of the female mercenary, who was dragging along an armor chest, and did not want to let her pass through so easily.

If the situation didn't change, the gate would close at sundown. Leontaine realised that the gatekeeper was asking for a bribe.

「You're looking to earn some extra money, huh...」

「It's work, you know. Work. If something were to occur, I couldn't possibly report to my superior that a suspicious mercenary was shown into the Old Capital, right?」

「This isn't really showing someone in, though.」

「It's fine today. We have to settle the problem regarding the conference with the three northern territories first. The number of people and things that were coming and going were increasing and it became very busy. Even people who were a little bit suspicious were turned away from entering, you know.」

That was true. The fact that the carriage, which Leontaine had previously passed, was fully loaded with luggage was a good sign that the trade with the North was becoming more favourable.

The three northern territories, especially that of Earl Wyndelmarc, had hired many mercenaries; but had since released them. The mercenaries were reimbursed half the agreed payment for breaking the contract. They wanted to hurry back home to spend the money, so the inns along the highways were packed with activity.

「In that case, could you let me through as it is?」

「You seem to be a female mercenary, but are you a Knight?」

「That's sharp of you...」

「That armor chest is something you would only find with people from your region, and it is something that's more of a burden than anything else for the ones who do have it.」

「I never would've thought my hometown would be exposed. You're very perceptive for a gatekeeper. Are all the guards of the Old Capital like this?」

The moustached sentry guard shrugged a little as he received the silver coins for the regular entry tax, plus the small extra tip from her.

「That's impossible. There are no other tactful lady-killers among the sentry guards in the Old Capital here, aside from Nikolaus.」

「C'est la vie. Then, while you're being tactful, could you tell me where I could find a pub with good alcohol? Frankly, I'm so famished that I could die.」

(TL: Replaced "Such is life" with "C'est la vie" because she has a French name.)

Nikolaus loosened his cheeks and grinned widely at Leontaine's frivolous talk.

「Pub, huh. I know a good place. There's no other store like it.」

As she walked according to the given directions, she reached a street with a pleasant atmosphere.

The cargo carriers and the cheap looking lodging houses that travellers used were built right next to each other. There also seemed to be inns where Leontaine, the female mercenary, wouldn't have problems staying at.

Among them, one bar stood out.

Although all the surrounding shops were made of stone, only one of them was built out of wood and plaster.

The store's name was Izakaya Nobu. It was written on a big flat signboard, with foreign letters also written on it.

「This is that guard's favourite place, huh.」

She wasn't able to shake off the suspicion that the store had given gold to people so that they would recommend it to anyone when asked.

Even so, she had already come this far. It was also troublesome to search for other stores, so Leontaine decided to enter the store without complaining.

「Welcome!」

「...elcome.」

When she opened the door, the first thing that surprised her was how cold it was.

Even though she did not understand the mechanism behind it, she did not feel any of the heat and humidity from outside the store. Also, this scent...

The store was pretty crowded, but a person had just left his seat, so there was now an empty seat by the counter.

Once Leontaine slipped into the store and sat down at her seat, she raised her hand to call the waitress.

For now, she needed a drink first, then food.

Anyway, if she did not sate her hunger with various things, it would get in the way of her true purpose for coming to the Old Capital.

「Here is your *otoshi*.」

(TL note: as previously mentioned, *otoshi*: appetizer)

The lovely, black-haired waitress served a small bowl that contained simmered shellfish.

Even though they had been removed from their shells, Leontaine, who grew up on the beach, recognised that they were shellfish with just one look. Had they simmered it in alcohol? It smelled good.

Otoshi was not the name of this dish. She figured that it was probably an appetizer that was served before the meal.



「This pub is quite stylish to even serve *amuse-gueule*, isn't it?」

(TL note: *amuse-gueule*: appetizer in French)

「Thank you very much. Today's *otoshi* is *torigai*. It's delicious, you know.」
(TL note: *torigai*: Japanese cockle.)

「Torigai, huh.」

With the carefree attitude of those who worked in the mercenary business, Leontaine picked up the simmered *torigai* with her fingers and threw it into her mouth. The shellfish, which had a wriggly texture, tasted a little bit like chicken. The chef was likely very skilled, since the bad smell was completely removed and the soup stock worked well.

She would have eaten as much as she liked if it were not for the small bowl.

「This is good. A store that serves good appetizers can be trusted. Can I have ale?」

「Certainly.」

Her small bowing gesture was also beautiful.

Leontaine was a knight who was familiar with high society, and it was difficult to find a good maid like her.

She was glad to be introduced to an unexpectedly good store and picked up a second piece of *torigai*.

「Yes, here's one 'Nama'.」

「'Nama', I have not heard that name before. Is this the local ale?」

「No, this is lager.」

「Lager...」

She had heard of the name before.

It seemed that it was made with a slightly different method from that of making ale, and the Empire should have monopolized its production and circulation. She felt like she had heard rumors about the ban being lifted a while ago.

「He~eh, how surprising.」

The cold lager that smoothly washed down her throat felt soothing beyond imagination.

The deliciousness soaked into Leontaine's body, which had accumulated fatigue since yesterday.

「The ‘Toriaezu Nama is delicious isn’t it’?」

It was someone other than the waitress from a while ago. It was a waitress with beige-coloured hair who spoke to her while being a little shy. Even though she was still young, she had quite the pretty face.

「I think I heard ‘Nama’ a while ago, but do you call this lager, ‘Toriaezu Nama’?」

「Yeah, all the regulars call it that.」

The minimum requirement for a pub to be good was to have regular customers.

People who did business just to rip off a first-time customer or a traveller were definitely not a decent bunch.

「Customer-san, so what would you like to order?」

「I’m fine with anything except potatoes. As long as it’s not potatoes. I ate so many potatoes up north that I’m sick of them.」

Earl Wyndelmarc was a good noble who made sure that the mercenaries received proper meals, but the meals mostly consisted of potatoes. During her time in the North, Leontaine had eaten more potatoes than anybody who lived in the Eastern Kingdom would ever eat in their lifetime.

「Actually, I’ve been curious since earlier...but what is that smell?」

「Ah, that smell? Which one would you like, customer-san?」

「Which what?」

「My *ushiojiru* or Taisho’s reworked faux bouillabaisse? Both are also delicious, you know.」

(TL note: *ushiojiru*: clear clam soup)



When she looked at where the waitress was pointing, the words ‘Helmina’s special *ushiojiru*’ and ‘Taisho’s special faux bouillabaisse’ were messily written on wooden signs.

The tally marks underneath were probably a popularity poll. Currently, the *ushiojiru* seemed to be in the lead.

「I understand what *ushiojiru* is. It’s a salty soup stewed with fish leftovers, right? Then what on earth is a ‘faux bouillabaisse?’」

「It’s vegetables that are briefly stir fried, and boiled together with tomatoes and seafood.」

She understood when she heard it. There was a similar dish in Leontaine’s hometown.

But there, it was not called with a fancy name like bouillabaisse. Instead, the fishermen back in her village would have simply called it boiled rockfish with tomatoes.

「Ah, then I’ll get that bouillabaisse. Afterwards, another glass of ‘Toriaezu

Nama'.」

「Yes, thank you very much.」

Helmina made a slight bow and returned to the kitchen to convey the orders. She was graceful and bubbly. Completely different from Leontaine, who had lived her life on a battlefield. It was different like wolves and dogs.

A noble lady's way of life might be different as well. When she thought like that, her loneliness suddenly re-emerged.

She had decided to disguise herself as a mercenary because of poverty, but if she had wanted to, she could've chose another path.

However, Leontaine was already 26 years old this year. She did not feel like dressing up in a dress and making an appearance in high society now. Even though she did not have any regrets, she couldn't do anything about it anymore.

「I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.」

She took a taste of the bouillabaisse that Helmina served with a wooden spoon.

「Huh...」

The flavour of the shrimp and other seafoods were deeply incorporated into the soup.

Even though it was a little different from the boiled rockfish with tomatoes from her home, it had a nostalgic taste.



「This is delicious!」

「I prepared too many *ushiojiru* ingredients...so Taisho boiled them with tomatoes to make something new.」

「I see. This is a great solution. There is a similar dish in the region of my home, but saffron was also added to that one.」

「Saffron, you say?」

Leontaine guessed that Helmina did not know about the existence of saffron from her blank face. It was understandable. The continent south, and its north. Even though the soup was cooked with the same fish, the ingredients and tastes were different.

「Ah. Also, I did not expect you to put squid in it.」

「Oh, I'm sorry. Do you dislike squid?」

「No, it's my favourite.」

Leontaine had an inseparable bond with squid.

「I...am a squid fisherman's daughter, but my husband couldn't eat squid until he got married to me.」

「He~eh, that guy is also a difficult one, huh.」

A squid fisherman's daughter would mean that she came from a port town. He might be a good-for-nothing man to purposely marry her and make her work in a pub. If it was a good daughter like her, she could have easily found a good family to be married into.

If she had came across Helmina when Helmina was still single and looking for a partner, she probably could have set Helmina up with a trustworthy man. When she thought about that, Leontaine chuckled to herself. Instead of worrying for the other party, she should worry about herself first. She was in a strange mood while she was eating the bouillabaisse.

Would she prepare boiled rockfish with tomatoes for her husband if she got married?

Even though the land was too barren for farming, the seafood around Leontaine's inherited territory was delicious.

Since the tax was half monetary and half goods, you could eat all the seafood you wanted there. Although she started her mercenary job because she was fed up with endless fish dishes everyday, she became homesick when she was away.

「Customer-san, are you a mercenary?」

「Ah, that's right. I am a mercenary. I was found out, huh.」

「That's because only mercenaries carry armor chests.」

「That's true.」

She should have found an inn and left the chest there first, but she was very hungry today. Even though the inns served meals, their main priority was to sate her hunger, and the taste was secondary.

「Actually, I am searching for a person.」

「A person, you say?」

「Ah, yes. That's why I came to the Old Capital.」

The signs of war had passed in the north. She should have returned to the Eastern Kingdom once she received her pay.

Still, she had turned towards the Old Capital since she had a lingering attachment to it.

「If mercenary-san wants to find a person, I have a few connections. Perhaps, I might be able to help.」

「He~eh, connections, huh. That's reassuring. I would be so grateful if you helped me.」

「Is that person something like a benefactor or an old friend of sorts?」

「No, it's a little different.」

Leontaine noticed that she had started talking without realizing. She thought she had already discarded her femininity a long time ago, but from the bittersweet feeling swelling in her chest, it seemed that some still remained.

「The person I'm searching for...is someone similar to a lover.」

Chapter 39: The Female Mercenary (Part 2)

It was supposed to be an unremarkable battle.

The battlefield was hazy, and it was drizzling. The army on the other side of the field was half the size of the Eastern Army that Leontaine was a part of.

It was an exaggeration to call it an army.

The feudal lord had scattered some coins, which drew in about 200 mercenaries. The Western Army only had about 100 troops, with a few stragglers.

If it was a battle between mercenaries, the side with the most numbers would win, unless something extraordinary happened. It was simple mathematics that even a child could understand.

The ground was muddy from the rain, with the mud reaching up to one's ankles.

It had started out as a quarrel between serfs. They were arguing over whether or not one serf's farmland intruded into the other's, and when blood was shed, their employers became involved, and then the feudal lords, until even the feudal lord's supporters also joined in the conflict.

In the first place, neither the commanding nobles nor mercenaries were motivated. They just had to clash halfheartedly and determine a winner, which would then settle the matter. The mercenaries would welcome any battle, as long as they got paid.

People congregated in the places where it would be unlikely to clash with an opponent, in order to avoid unnecessary injuries.

Leontaine herself had also only intended to fight halfheartedly.

On the other side, there was a [Demon].

The [Demon]'s strategy was to launch a surprise attack to defeat them in one fell swoop by using his employer, [Horseface] Ferdinand, who had a weak fighting spirit, as a decoy. The [Demon] and his company detoured around the forest through the shrubbery, and charged in, breaking through the Eastern Army's weak flank.

As Leontaine started to retell her battle, the customers in the pub gathered around, with mugs in hand. They had been starving for these kinds of stories. A live story like this was unexpectedly well received.

Someone passed around a small plate, without any bad intentions, to gather change for drinks or snacks.

Even though Leontaine was now a mercenary, she was originally a lower class noble's daughter. During her education, she had grown fond of poetry. Even though she wasn't as good as a genuine minstrel, she became fired up once people started becoming interested.

It was a pleasant feeling to see even the dishwasher girl timidly appearing from behind the counter to listen to her story.

Leontaine moistened her mouth with a second glass of 'Toriazusu Nama' and continued her story.

The strength of the [Demon], who charged ahead, was overwhelming. The four people in front of him were reduced to two, and from two to one, as a result of his ambush.

The reason was his equipment.

Although it was a melee, the [Demon] was only wearing minimal armour. Armor would definitely be a hindrance in the current situation, where the ground was marsh-like.

However, people normally wouldn't dare to throw their armour away. In a battlefield where a single blow could mean death, the [Demon] certainly stood out from the rest, with his superb handling of the flow of battle. He had just one goal, the general's head. The [Demon] broke through the Eastern Army's formation, like a black kite aiming for its prey

「That's amazing...」

Helmina muttered while leaking out words of admiration. She was standing still while carrying a mug, engrossed with the story.

「Yeah. I have stood on the battlefield for quite a while now, but for the first time in my life, I got goosebumps, just by looking at the [Demon].」

「Then, did Leontaine-san fight against that [Demon] too?」

「Yeah, I fought against him too.」

She should have been positioned in a location where the enemy wouldn't approach, but before she knew it, she had ended up on the front lines. The [Demon] had accurately predicted where he thought the safest place would be.

Leontaine braced herself and brandished her sword.

She was wearing the armour that she had inherited. The squid crest on her helm represented her noble house clan, which boasted about defending the coastal sea area for many generations.

「Eh, Leontaine's helmet is decorated with a squid crest?」

「What's the problem, Helmina? I'm nearly at the good part. That's correct, the family crest of my house and the crest on my helm is a squid. Is it strange?」

Even though the continent was wide, Leontaine would be the only mercenary who wore a squid crest on her helm. She intended to raise her voice and laugh at the coming joke, but Helmina looked pale.

On the contrary, she ended up turning her face away in front of the customers.

「Hey, hey, what's wrong? From here on, I will begin the story of the battle between me and the [Demon].」

「By any chance, is the person that Leontaine is pursuing, this [Demon]?」

「You realised it, huh. The moment he realized I was a woman, he went easy on me.」

Leontaine, who did not notice that the veteran war hero [Demon] had pulled his arm away, slashed his left arm.

Even though he was safe because he defended with his gauntlet, there might still be some aftereffects.

「I...wanted to say a few words of thanks to him for that time. That's why I have been searching for the [Demon] all this time.」

「Leontaine-san, do you know the [Demon]'s name?」

「Sadly, I don't know that. The entire battlefield was in disarray. However, I would recognise him if I meet him. That's all I am confident about.」

「Is...that so?」

「What? Why? Why did you suddenly start tearing up?」

The storekeeper who had been silently cooking till now answered Leontaine's question.

「It's like this. The [Demon] who appeared in your story is very similar to one of our store's regulars.」

「I-is that true?」

It was a big step forward. Until now, she had been continuously searching aimlessly before coming here.

Perhaps she could meet the regular of this store if she came tonight.

「Ah, what should I do?! I'm happy, and nervous...but it doesn't mean I'm not ready to meet him...what should I do, Helmina?!」

「Leontaine-san, please calm down. We're not sure yet.」

「No, I have a good feeling about this. I would be able to meet him here tonight. I'm sure of this lead. When we meet, I'd like to thank him first. And then, and then...Ah! What should I do?!」

「Please calm down. My husband should be coming soon.」

The world froze at Helmina's words, and Leontaine fell silent.

「...Husband? What does Helmina's husband have anything to do with this?」

Leontaine, who wasn't aware of the circumstances, put some strength into her words, so Helmina put on a resigned expression and answered.

「The [Demon] that Leontaine-san is searching for, might be...my husband.」

Chapter 40: The Female Mercenary (Part 3)

The store's interior fell so silent, one could hear a pin drop. Leontaine felt everyone's eyes gather on her. Gazes of pity, sympathy, and even curiosity. Although there were various expressions directed at her, the feeling coming from Leontaine's chest wasn't one of a broken heart.

「Ahahaha!」

「Leontaine...-san?」

Helmina worriedly looked at Leontaine, who had suddenly burst out with laughter. She thought that Leontaine's mind had become strange from the shock of having her heart broken.

「No, no. Everything is fine, Helmina. That's perfectly alright. It was a story from many years ago. It's probably been as long as the time between when I was still a small, childish lass and when I had grown up to become an excellent mercenary. It isn't strange for that stupidly strong [Demon] to settle down and start a family.」

「Ha, haa...」

「On the contrary, I'm happy. The fact that he didn't end up as a corpse lying on a battlefield somewhere.」

Leontaine drank the contents of her mug in one gulp and lifted the empty mug up to the sky.

「This is to commemorate my heartbreak! Today is my treat, so drink up!」

A commotion arose and after that, order after order came in quick succession. Even though Leontaine thought that a heartbreak commemoration was a strange excuse, she couldn't make noise if she didn't do it that night. Helmina and the other waitress, as well as the dishwasher girl, were busy taking a rapidly increasing number of orders.

「Leo, Leontaine-san...a-are you really alright?」

Helmina asked anxiously, while carrying three mugs of 'Toriaezu Nama' in both hands.

The tips of Leontaine's eyebrows drooped down, as if she was going to burst into tears at any moment.

Leontaine held back her desire to cry out loud, and she slapped Helmina's back with her palm.

They gave up on taking individual orders. The chef served large plates of appetizers, one after another; the customers would take whichever ones they liked and put them onto their own plate.

There were some dishes among the colourful array that Leontaine had never seen before, but all of them were delicious and went well with alcohol.

When she was staring at the drunken people, who were drinking alcohol together and enjoying the treats without reserve, the sound of the glass door being pulled open abruptly resounded through the store.

「Hey, hey, what's the commotion about?」

The moment she heard that voice, Leontaine felt her heart throb, like that of a pure maiden.

She couldn't forget it. That voice, it was the [Demon].

It was the voice of that [Demon] that she had heard in her dreams for many, many years.

When she turned around and looked at the door, she was sure that it was the man standing there.

「A-are you the [Demon]?」

Through the self-control that she had forged on the battlefield, Leontaine managed to keep herself from reflexively running up to him. The [Demon] was confused. It was similar to how he had looked when he was showing Leontaine mercy during that battle.

「Err, you are...?」

The other party did not recognise Leontaine. It was to be expected. It would be impossible to remember an opponent who had crossed blades with him on that battlefield so many years ago.

「By any chance, are you the mercenary with that squid helm?」

Throb.

Her heart throbbed again. It shouldn't have been possible. He shouldn't have remembered her.

She remembered the battle as if had happened yesterday, but it was supposed to just be a common battlefield for him.

「It's you, after all. Judging by your physique, I'm not mistaken.」

「Y-you remembered...?」

It was impossible.

She had crossed many other battlefields since then, but she had never encountered him again.

How strange of a coincidence was it for the [Demon] to still remember her?

The [Demon] scratched his left arm with his index finger and gave an awkward smile.

「That's because it's rare for a woman to be a mercenary.」

Leontaine couldn't see his face properly when he said those words, since he hurriedly picked up a bowl of ushiojiru and drank it to hide his face.

The saltiness of the soup was comforting for a worn-out body.

「[Demon], it is my treat today. You should drink with your wife.」

「Is that alright, [Squid Helm]?」

「I don't mind. I'm doing quite well now.」

Leontaine had secretly made a decision when she saw the [Demon]'s smiling face.

Tomorrow, she would leave the Old Capital. If she saw this smile one more time, she might not be able to give it up again.

The [Demon] currently had a wonderful wife named Helmina.

She would leave this town before her regrets deepened.

However, tonight, just for tonight, she wanted to continue liking the [Demon].

When she thought about that while drinking the ushiojiru, she felt that the soup tasted a little too salty.



Chapter 41: The Mackerel Pike of the Old Capital

(Part 1)

Eleanora looked at her desk, which was messy as usual, and heaved a small sigh.

It was already dark outside by the time she finished her work, and today's fatigue was weighing down on her shoulders.

There were bundles of parchment paper, her familiar quill pen, and a bottle of ink on the big wooden desk, which had been cut from a piece of the gigantic Mongolian Oak.

Even though everything was of high quality, she did not particularly seek extravagance. Since she used a desk a lot at work, it would actually be more expensive to replace or repair a cheaper desk. As the Guild Master of one of the three Water Transportation Guilds in the Old Capital, she had many things to handle.

For example, this pile of letters.

It was due to the Guild's deep connections with the Eastern Kingdom and the Northern Three Territories that they had risen to this point, so having a letter written by the Guild Master, Eleonora herself, was a powerful weapon and a lifeline at the same time.

Due to her bewitching aura that went hand in hand with her beautiful looks, there were rumours that Eleonora left all her work to her subordinates. It was a serious misunderstanding of her, but she believed that she knew the origin of the rumours.

Due to her mother's negligent management of the business, Eleonora had to write dozens of letters every day, and fingers became callused.

This guild had been succeeded matrilineally every generation, and its rapid expansion was also due to her mother's influence.

She had pulled skilled members from Reinhold's collapsing guild, and they had become the second most powerful guild in the Old Capital in one fell swoop.

Everything was thanks to her womanly charm.

Eleonora's mother, whom even her daughter recognized as extremely beautiful, knew the value of one's own beauty better than anyone else.

If the expansion of the guild relied on a woman's charm, then maintaining the guild was also dependent on it.

That was how Eleonora grew up to be a misandrist. However, she didn't intend to let anybody know that. Even though she was seen as an amorous woman who seduced men, she could count the number of men who had held her hands before on one hand.

Besides being beautiful, she had a relatively high-level of curiosity. This was due to not wanting to lose to her mother as a woman. Although she was more beautiful than her mother, she did not want to use her beauty in the same way. That was Eleonora's principles on beauty. However that was all.

She worked during the day and during her free time. Recently however, Eleonora had found a secret pleasure.

「Welcome!」
「...elcome」

Eleonora returned the usual warm greetings with a small nod and sat down at one of the seats by the counter without hesitation.

She received a warm, wet towel from Shinobu with her weary hands and couldn't help but enjoy the feeling.

Eleonora looked at the menu while enjoying the sensation of blood flowing through every nook and cranny of her stiff hands.

The lager of this store was certainly delicious, but recently, Eleonora preferred to order *reishu* exclusively.

It was her clever tactic to wash down the delicious dishes and her occupational sorrow at the same time with cool, clear sake.

(TL note: *reishu* = cold sake)

「I will have this Dewazakura today. And then, some delicious fish.」
(TL: Dewazakura: a sake brewing company brand)

「Do you want it grilled? Or do you want it stewed?」

「Oh, right...then, I want it grilled.」

Shinobu, who was serving an *otoshi* of *kinpira gobou*, conveyed the orders and brought out a beautiful glass immediately. Unlike the 'Toriaezu Nama', which was served after it was filled, the *reishu* was poured from the bottle, in front of the guest.

It was a refreshing sight to see the clear *reishu* fill up the glass with a 'glug-glug' sound, and she welled up with joy marvelling at it.

(TL note: *kinpira gobou* = braised burdock root and carrots in a sweet and salty sauce)



Her first order of business was to wet her mouth with a sip of the Dewazakura.

She enjoyed the aroma. While she was enjoying the refined taste of the liquor, she brought her chopsticks to the *kinpara gobou*.

It had a crunchy texture, and a tingling spiciness that intensified the flavours. Then she brought the cup to her mouth again. The taste of the soy sauce from the *kinpira gobou* was washed down, leaving only a refreshing aftertaste in her mouth.

At first, Eleonora had eaten with a knife and fork, but since she realized that

eating that way wasn't considered "elegant" in the store, she started using chopsticks.

In the store, the usual sentries were drinking lager with tempura, while seemingly having a serious talk.

The area around the Old Capital was very peaceful after settling the problem concerning the Northern Three Territories.

It seemed that they were telling a story about a witch, but Eleonora had no inkling on what it was about at all.

Eleonora did not have a good impression of the duo, especially the one growing a moustache, Nikolaus. He had an aura similar to that of a womanizer about him.

This did not mean that he was an enemy of women. Rather, she felt that they treated women as beings who needed to be treated gently.

However, it may have also been due to Eleonora's fear of her true nature being seen through. She believed that he would be difficult to deal with.

「Sorry to have kept you waiting, Eleonora-san. This is *sanma*.」

(TL note: *sanma*: mackerel pike fish)

「*Sanma*, you say?」

Shinobu was carrying a slender and long fish grilled with salt.

It looked like a sand lance fish, but the body was slightly thicker than that.

The fatty body looked perfectly grilled, and the fragrant smell tickled her nose.



「It's the first catch of the season. This year's mackerel pikes are very fatty and delicious, you know.」

「It seems to pair well with *reishu*, doesn't it?」

Eleonora, who was nodding along to Shinobu's words, was already eyeing the delicious-looking mackerel pike.

She gulped while looking at the dish, which had been served on a rectangular plate and had soy sauce dripping from it, with white grated daikon piled on top of it.

When she brought her chopsticks to it, the skin gave way with a crispy sound, and the flesh inside was revealed.

She impatiently tore off a piece of flesh, and then carefully brought it to her mouth.

Delicious. It was delicious.

The forceful flavour of fish oozed into her mouth with the oils as she chewed on the fat.

Finally, she washed it down with Dewazakura.

It was irresistible.

Next, she took another bite with the grated daikon on top. The refreshing taste of the grated daikon gently washing away the taste of the oils was truly a work of art. Something that was reddish brown appeared from inside the white flesh. Were those the mackerel pike's internal organs? She became uneasy for an instant, but it was impossible for Izakaya Nobu to cut corners. The fact that it was here meant that it could be eaten.

Eleonora timidly extended her chopsticks towards it while thinking so. She ate it in one bite.

Bitter.

She drank the Dewazakura by reflex.

At that moment, something strange happened. It was still bitter, but it became delicious. Even though Eleonora had not particularly liked bitter things ever since she was a child, she could eat this mackerel pike's internal organs. In fact, wasn't it pairing well with the *reishu*?

The refined taste of *reishu*, and the mackerel pike's innards. Eleonora was captivated by the strange harmony between them.

「Does the mackerel pike's *wata* suit your taste?」
(TL note: *wata*: guts)

Shinobu handed Eleonora another wet towel to wipe her greasy hands off on.

「The innards of a mackerel pike...are called *wata*?」

「Yes. We remove them from other types of fishes, as only the mackerel pike's is delicious when eaten. It goes well with cold sake, doesn't it?」

「Yeah, this is very tasty.」

It looked unattractive, and tasted bitter. The bitterness complemented the taste of the cold sake really well. Eleonora, who was filled with wonder at this discovery, held the chopsticks on the mackerel pike.

It was a delicious fish, but it was difficult to eat.

She had poked at in various ways, making the mackerel pike become a disfigured lump of meat on the plate.

There was only a little *reishu* left too. Just when she wanted to order another dish, someone called out to Eleonora from behind.

「Ah, that's so wasteful. There is still a bit more that you can eat.」

Chapter 42: The Mackerel Pike of the Old Capital

(Part 2)

The person who had looked at the plate of mackerel pike and said that was one of the sentry guard pair, the one with the moustache. If she remembered correctly, his name was Nikolaus.

「There are still a lot of parts that you can eat.」

His face drew near.

He was probably drunk. His breath reeked of alcohol, and the smell drifted through the air. His face was flushed red, and was now beside Eleonora's. How long had it been since a younger man had gotten this close? While looking at the moustache growing on his chin, Eleonora suddenly recalled her past.

Father also had a similar moustache.

It wasn't the 'father' nominated by the church. It was her biological father, who was related to her by blood. Even if she said so, she didn't hear it from her mother directly. It was probably a woman's intuition. She had only seen him once, but she understood that he was where half of her body originated from.

Among the men who were interested in her mother, he could not be considered attractive.

He was not particularly special or notable. To be honest, she couldn't even picture his face clearly. She only remembered that he had an ordinary looking face.

That man's hobby was to annoy her mother, but for some reason, he was not treated harshly. That might have been how a twisted couple would act.

「Bu~t, I cannot pluck out anymore. That's the reason it became like this.」

「It's alright, it can still be eaten.」

The shabby leftovers of what used to be a mackerel pike lay on the plate. Nikolaus took a pair of disposable wooden chopsticks from the chopstick stand, while ignoring the protests made by the sulking Eleonora.

He broke the mackerel pike's body into smaller pieces in one smooth movement, without hesitation.

"It's beautiful," Eleonora thought, even though it was just Nikolaus handling the chopsticks.

He pinched the mackerel pike's head and completely removed the spine with his deft hands. Meat magically appeared, even though Eleonora had thought that there wasn't any more flesh to pluck off.

After a while, a portion of meat lay separated from the mackerel pike's spine, which was still attached to its head and tail.

「Taisho, can you make that from the other day?」

「Ah, the mackerel pike rice, huh.」

Taisho received the plate of mackerel pike meat from Nikolaus and tossed some cooked rice into a pan.

He added some seasonings into the soup, which Shinobu and the rest called dashi, and added that into the pan as well. Then, he added the mackerel pike's meat and cooked it together.

Eleonora, who didn't cook much, thought that the end product would taste similar to barley porridge. Contrary to what she expected, although the rice soaked up the dashi, it was still plump and fluffy.

It looked somewhat like the eel bento.

Even though there was a difference between dashi and tare, they were still similar in the sense that they combined both rice and fish.

She knew quite a bit about the eel bento because she had sent messengers to buy them secretly, as she had heard from Shinobu that it was good for the skin.

However, the mackerel pike rice looked different.

To be honest, it didn't look good.

Even though there were green spring onions scattered on top, it looked like leftover food and did not appeal to Eleonora's aesthetic sense.

However, what was that appetizing fragrance?

The pieces of flesh that Nikolaus had plucked out were properly mixed with the rice, and an unknown fragrance drifted over the counter.

When it was served to her, the fragrance became even more prominent.

「I don't eat many beautiful dishes, but it's delicious, you know.」

Nikolaus recommended it while laughing heartily, and Eleonora brought her chopsticks to the mackerel pike rice.

The rice, packed with the mackerel pike's flavours, crumbled in her mouth. It was easy to eat.

The mackerel pike's strong taste was delicious enough to be taken with sake, but Eleonora, who was not used to eating it, felt that the flavour was a little too rich.

Then, how about this mackerel pike rice?

The ginger (inguva) used had been effective, because the simmered blue-backed fish did not have any stench.

The spring onion not only gave some colour to it, but also changed the texture. Pickled eggplants were also added as garnish, which served as a good palate cleanser.

Even though it looked so unattractive, why was it so delicious?

Furthermore, this delicious taste was not luxurious. Instead, it was a somewhat nostalgic, calming flavour.

She wanted to savour it forever. While she was thinking such thoughts, the bowl had already been emptied.

The amount was also just right. If it was too much, her stomach would feel heavy; if it was too little, she would have needed to order another item. For some reason, Eleonora thought about her real father while looking at the empty bowl.

「Hey, it's surprisingly delicious even with such an appearance, right?」

「Yeah, it really is.」

It was really delicious.

Eleonora, who had summoned chefs from the Capital and had indulged in all kinds of gourmet food, couldn't believe that her heart was moved by a dish with such an appearance.

This was why she wouldn't stop frequenting Izakaya Nobu, no matter what her subordinates said.

「Young lady, because you are a beautiful lady, I will tell you another delicious

dish.」

Eleonora finally realised from Nikolaus's words. This man was drunk. He probably did not even notice that the person whom he was speaking to right now was Eleonora, the Master of the Water Transportation Guild. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for her to be addressed in such a familiar manner.

She understood, but for some reason, she still felt a little lonely. She wondered if she would meet this man, who sported an unattractive moustache, again next time.

「Thank you, Casanova-san. Let's meet again if there's a chance next time.」

Eleonora thanked the lady-killer sentry guard politely, whom she had superimposed her father's image over for an instant, and took out her purse. Even including the tip, the amount of silver coins she paid Shinobu was ten times the required amount. Eleonora nodded quietly at the perplexed Shinobu, who was counting the coins. Izakaya Nobu's poster girl seemed to understand and stored the silver coins in the cashbox.

Would the moustached guard come to this pub again tomorrow? While wishing for it, Eleonora began to slowly walk back home under the moonlight.

Chapter 43: Takowasa (Part 1)

「Another glass of ‘Torieazu Nama’ please! Nevermind, this is troublesome. Please bring two glasses instead!」

Godhardt ordered a lager enthusiastically, then rubbed his palms together while facing the appetizer in front of him.

Today’s order was an unagi zukushi.

There was eel kabayaki, eel shirayaki, umaki and kimosui.

(TL note: unagi zukushi = all eel meal; kimosui = eel liver soup)



From top left clockwise: Kabayaki, Shirayaki, Kimosui, Umaki

The eel craze had settled down in Izakaya Nobu recently, instead food carts with eel gyosho yaki on the menu had started to become popular.

Even though his subordinates loved it, Godhardt felt that it still had a long way to go.

Nevertheless, since various stores competed to come up with it, so recently they were coming up with foods that could be eaten quickly.

(TL note: eel gyosho yaki = grilled eel with fish sauce)

In the end, no matter who sold eel in the Old Capital, Godhardt would always make a profit.

The fishing rights of the Old Capital currently belonged to Godhardt.

「Since we don't have to worry about money, we shall feast!」

「Fuu... Haa...Ha....」

The one who cowered in front of his eyes, but was brazenly eating the shirayaki and drinking the atsukan, was unexpectedly, Reinhold.

Like Godhardt, he was also a Master of a Water Transportation Guild, but he had not made any significant profits recently, so his guild was weakening.

Since Godhardt became rich after ripping off Reinhold's guild and obtaining the fishing rights, it seemed like there had been some shady things going on.

atsukan is hot sake

Godhardt hadn't swindled it from Reinhold, but the value of the fishing rights before and after the exchange had changed greatly.

Nowadays, there was no one in the old Capital who treated eel as a worthless fish.

Without Izakaya Nobu, eel would still be a worthless fish that could only be made into edible jelly, but this had changed over time.

While waiting for Shinobu to serve the lager, he brought a piece of umaki to his mouth with a fork.

The flavour of the smooth egg and the eel sauce, blended together in perfect harmony within his mouth.

This. This was eel.

「Sorry to have kept you waiting, here are two glasses of 'Nama'.」

Just as he was eating the kabayaki, Shinobu brought out the lager at just the right time.

This was too good.

Izakaya Nobu's eels were fluffy but still contained a strong flavour.

Could it be the fat accumulated over autumn? Godhardt preferred this over the ones he ate during summer.

「Reinhold-san, this eel is really a delicious dish, huh. I think I could eat this every day if it's like this.」

「Godhardt-san, your voice is too loud. There are other customers as well. Also, I think I would get tired of it if I ate it every day.」

After being told that there were other customers around, he looked around and saw that there were a lot of customers in Izakaya Nobu today. Among the faces, he recognised the sentry guard pair, the deacon, and the tax collector with a monocle.

Gernot was also eating Napolitan today. There were also a few unknown faces here and there.

There was one who looked so large, it seemed like he was going to burst. The girl in charge of the dishes, Eva, and the young wife of the Company Commander also worked here.

「This is a big deal. It has not even been a year since this store opened for business, Reinhold-san.」

「That means that the customers think well of it. It is very important for a restaurant, you know.」

「It is that way for the Water Transportation Guild too.」

The reason why Godhardt was able to speak on such familiar terms with Reinhold now wasn't because of the big difference in the sizes of their guilds, due to the matter of the fishing rights.

Reinhold, who judged that it wasn't possible to conduct business by himself alone, had recently started working as Godhardt's subcontractor.

Even if both were from Water Transportation Guilds, they had their own respective expertise.

As the oldest Water Transportation Guild in the Old Capital, the technological strength of the remaining guild members under Reinhold was high.

With Reinhold's cooperation, they could undertake a whole new level of work that would not have been possible previously.

Since they began working as a team, it had come to a point where their reputation to their main clients, who were ship owners and companies, had become better, so Godhardt had been in a good mood recently.

「Reinhold-san, we had various issues in the past, but I'm glad we are working well together now. I would be grateful if you let bygones be bygones.」

「It's the same with me. Ever since Godhardt-san sent jobs to me, I have finally been able to take a breather. Once again, thank you very much.」

After making a toast with their glasses and sake cups, they downed their liquor in one go.

Delicious liquor taken together with delicious appetizers.

There was nothing happier than this for a body that was fatigued from work.

「So, Reinhold-san, I heard that you had something serious to discuss with me today.」

「Yeah, that's right. Well then, I'll tell you the story soon.」

Even though Godhardt did not know of the contents of the talk, he understood that it was business related.

He figured that it would be about the business arrangements that Reinhold had made with the fishing village in the north previously.

Reinhold had a feeling that Godhardt would agree to almost anything today.

However on the contrary, he wanted to stop it if it became a ridiculous gamble.

Reinhold, who had succeeded the Water Transportation Guild from his father, believed that he was still young and wanted to become successful in one shot, but he couldn't deny the fact that he lacked experience.

Before his mind became dulled by becoming drunk, Reinhold wanted Godhardt to listen to this youngster's idea first.

「As you know, Godhardt-san, our guild can only maintain the water transportation on the scale of the Old Capital, and that is our limit.」

「That's true. There's Eleonora's part as well.」

The three guilds had been able to coexist until now, but there were some circumstances as to why each guild had only employed a few labourers.

As a matter of fact, the second and third sons from the surrounding rural areas had come to the old Capital in droves recently, so it felt like the number of labourers had slightly increased. Naturally, the Water Transportation Guild, that operated a business, had interests in this area, but conflicts had appeared.

「Therefore, I'm thinking of starting a new business.」

「New business? That's brave.」

「Since my guild is the smallest, I can say this casually.」

Even so, Reinhold's guild was the oldest, and had some history as well. It was a shameful way of thinking to just declare that they were the smallest guild so casually.

However, Godhardt wasn't that insensitive to point that out. It was Reinhold who had to make a decision about his troubles. There was also the feeling of wanting to support him.

「The Eisen Schmidt Company, that deals with grain trading, seems to have opened up the market in the North recently.」

「Yeah, have you begun handling Joosten wheat? Since Bachschouf was gone, I heard that there are many profitable opportunities appearing.」

The Bachschouf company that tried to make Izakaya Nobu theirs was dissolved on suspicions of lager smuggling. The aftermath of that incident was still felt in various places.

「This talk is about getting involved in that market.」

「Getting involved, huh. Briefly speaking, I think it's difficult.」

「Yeah, I would have my company purchase their special products, which haven't had any exposure in the Old Capital so far.」

「Are you saying you want me to lend you capital?」

Indeed, that sounded reasonable.

The dealings themselves were the company's domain, but Reinhold would have a share in this in the form of financial investment there.

It was a small gamble to borrow some funds from Godhardt's guild, but there was also the debt of gratitude.

「I feel really guilty, but would you please lend it to me?」

「I can't really say an amount or a time interval, since we're here. However, I think this is an interesting discussion.」

That was all Godhardt could say for now. However, there was one, no, two things that bothered him.

「Well, Reinhold-san. I have two things I want to ask.」

「What is it?」

Reinhold replied with a serious expression.

「First, why did you plan to deal with the Eisen Schmidt Company? And second...that thing under the counter, that strange pot that is moving from time to time. What is that?」

It was difficult to ask, as Reinhold had come earlier, but there was a strange pot underneath his seat, and it had been moving slightly all the time.

「I can answer both of your questions at the same time.」

Reinhold lifted the pot from the floor and removed the lid slowly. The smell of the sea drifted through the air.

「This is the special product that will carry our guilds' futures on its shoulders... an octopus.」

Chapter 44: Takowasa (Part 2)

「He-hey, Reinhold-san. Isn't that...」

That slippery 'thing' crawled out of the open pot.

The weird creature, which was covered in slimy mucus and slowly crept across the floor, seemed to still be very much alive.

Godhardt had never seen this creature called an 'octopus' before.

If it were a squid, he would recognize it.

If one said they did not know what a squid was in Izakaya Nobu, they were very unqualified.

The [Demon] Berthold, the company commander of the sentry corps that was in charge of the defense of the Old Capital, had a former fear of squid.

The octopus was a creature similar to that, so it could probably be eaten too.

The interior of the store suddenly became noisy, due to the unexpected appearance of the rare 'guest'.

Some of the customers were even shouting to get rid of it.

Even Gernot, who usually boasted of having a calm and collected disposition in the council, only looked calm, while taking refuge at the corner of the wall with his Napolitan dish.

The only ones who remained calm were Shinobu, Taisho, Eva, and the young wife of the company commander, who was called Helmina, if he wasn't mistaken.

The women were tough at such times.

Meanwhile, Helmina expertly caught the octopus and shoved it back into the jar.

During this commotion, it seemed that the pair of sentry guards were stunned and couldn't do anything. Could they really protect the town like this?

「I'm sorry. I didn't think it was still so lively.」

Reinhold scratched his head apologetically.

While the customers got a hold of themselves and jeers were thrown around, Godhardt was observing Taisho's facial expressions.

Those were the eyes of a chef.

Godhardt wanted to make sure that the octopus was marketable.

If Reinhold's octopus was anything like a squid and could be eaten, it would be a huge advantage if they could transport them fresh to the Old Capital.

It wasn't like you couldn't eat it after it died and some time had passed, but if you could transport it alive, it would be a different story. Wasn't it better if the state of freshness could be preserved?

'Perhaps.' Godhardt turned towards Reinhold.

Even though he thought Reinhold was a well raised young master, this man might have brought the octopus here on purpose.

If that was the case, then he was unexpectedly shrewd.

If he thought about it, what was Godhardt doing when he was Reinhold's age? Didn't he do nothing but picking fights everyday?

「Ugh.」

「What's the matter, Godhardt-san? Groaning like that. Your precious eel is getting cold.」

「Eh, ah, that's right.」

Shinobu casually exchanged the lagers, which had become lukewarm after the commotion. Such consideration for the customers was hard to come by in other restaurants.

While he was gulping down the new lager, Reinhold was talking about giving the octopus to Taisho.

「How about it? This octopus. I'll hand it over to you, so won't you try cooking it? Of course, I won't charge you for taking it.」

「I'm thankful for that, but it'll take some time.」

「I don't mind. The night is still young.」

The surrounding guests seemed to have taken an interest in the conversation between the two, and there were signs that they were pricking their ears up to listen.

Everyone intended to take part in sampling the leftovers.

Taisho decided to cook the octopus, preparing it with deft movements. The octopus was quickly prepped in front of their eyes, while Shinobu was grating daikon.

「I only need to rub it with salt actually, but this octopus seems firm, so I will rub this grated daikon on it too.」

Shinobu usually served the tables, but she also grated the daikon skillfully. The bowl was filled up with grated daikon in the blink of an eye. The customers gulped in anticipation. There would never be a time when it would be as wasteful as leaving now. Apparently, it was possible to eat octopus in various ways, so they had ordered lager and prepared for a drawn-out wait.

Eva, who was wiping the floor where the octopus had crawled, also rushed about, taking orders in a flurry. Helmina was filling ordinary beer mugs with lager, and had been carrying them from one table to another. Also, since Taisho's hands were full, no appetizers were refilled. In that case, every seat seemed to be talking about the flowers blossoming. There was a topic about a witch or something similar that had come up at a table, but Reinhold and Godhardt concerned about something else.

「This year's harvest festival seems to be smaller than usual.」

「That's because the Bachschouf company has shut down, and there seems to have been a dispute in the management of the Grand Bazaar.」

「It was preferable when compared to having most of the profits taken away, huh.」

Even though there were several months till the harvest festival, the preparation for it would begin soon. It was important for the Water Transportation Guild to allocate tasks between the opening of the Grand Bazaar and the harvest festival, which was held at the same time. Merchants from all over the Empire gathered at the Grand Bazaar, which was held only once a year. Even though the profits earned was huge, it wasn't trouble-free. During that time, the reputation of the Water Transportation Guild was at

stake, in case there was any carelessness during the transportation of goods.

「The preparation for the octopus and the Grand Bazaar is essential, is that what you're saying?」

「That's right. Once Eleonora is together with us, the three of us should have a proper briefing.」

「I see. So, where is this meeting?」

Reinhold awkwardly asked an unnecessary question. The answer was understood when Godhardt saw him smiling.

「I've decided for it to be in this store.」

While they were talking about it, the preparation of the octopus seemed to have finally ended.

Taisho, who prepared the octopus with his splendid kitchen knife, was washing the now thinly sliced octopus with water.

「First up, it's sashimi.」

Octopus sashimi

The sashimi was beautifully arranged on the plate like white petals. When it was crawling on the floor, it looked like the minion of an evil god sleeping in the depths of the sea, but strangely it now looked very appetizing. He picked up a slice, dipped it in soy sauce, and brought it to his mouth.

「Oh...?」

His voice leaked out unintentionally at the chewy texture in his mouth. It was firm when he chewed on it. Even though he had eaten fish sashimi several times before, this one had a different taste.

「This is softer than the time I ate it in the northern town...」

Reinhold picked up two, no three slices of sashimi while saying so. Not wanting to lose, Godhardt also extended his chopsticks, unexpectedly enjoying the firmness of the octopus. This dish would pair well with cold sake.

「Excuse me, Shinobu-chan. A glass of cold sake here please.」

「Ah, me too please.」

The orders for cold sake came pouring in after one person asked for it. Gernot, who was suspected of suffering from a strange illness of only being able to eat Napolitan, was stealthily holding a glass of white wine in one hand.

It matched well.

As expected, the octopus sashimi and the cold sake pair well together.

The cold, dry taste of the cold sake enhanced the umami flavour of the octopus by several times.

The octopus was indeed an ingredient suitable for sashimi.

Although there was no tradition of eating raw fresh fish in the Old Capital, it would be a different story if they could purchase live octopus from the northern port city.

A considerable profit might come out of this.

The sashimi had been cleared in the blink of an eye, but the next dish was served as if it had been waiting for this time.

「Next is octopus karaage.」

Tako karaage



The tentacles, which were cut into chunks, had been deep fried and even had a strong fragrance.

How did the fragrance from the oil cause the stomach to have such violent reactions and set up this kind of temptation?

There should be lager for this.

Godhardt's instinct as a drinker was strongly insisting on it.

「Shinobu-chan, one glass of 'Toriazuzu Nama' here!」

「Here please!」

「Here too, please!」

He held a gulp of lager in his mouth, and his taste buds returned to normal. Octopus karaage.

The chicken karaage was a famous dish of Izakaya Nobu.

So, the octopus was a strong enough contender to be made into karaage, huh?

He contemplated this quietly as he picked up a piece.

Crunch.

He took a bite, and noticed his blunder.

The octopus was not meant to be eaten as sashimi.

It was meant to be eaten as karaage. This creature had been created by God solely for this purpose.

If he thought about it that way, he could accept that monstrous appearance. That dubious and eerie figure was to hide this delicacy from human beings. Naturally, it also paired well with lager. It was a little bit more exquisite, as he had been told that it was spiced a little more than the chicken karaage. It could become a habit to eat octopus karaage.

「Is it to your liking?」

Shinobu asked him while carrying a second glass of lager. Godhardt vigorously nodded to declare so.

「This octopus karaage is wonderful. It also pairs well with 'Toriazuzu Nama'. This will be my usual order from tomorrow onwards. Of course, I'll eat eel from time to time, but when I have octopus, I want it to be karaage.」

「Did you like it that much?」

「Ah, I am really pleased with it. Somehow, I feel like expressing myself like the poet Krowinkel now.」

「Poet...?」

Shinobu, who didn't seem to understand what he was referring to, was nudged in the elbow by Reinhold, who had come to the rescue.

「It seems that Godhardt-san has a splendid fondness of poems and tales. That Krowinkel is a bard who only sings songs about cooking. His poems are collected and have been made into a book as well.」

「I see, there are various kinds of people huh.」

The empty mug was pushed towards the admiring Shinobu.

「I don't look like a learned person, do I? It doesn't fit the appearance of a Guild Master who only has physical strength. Right, Reinhold-san?」

「Am I lacking in physical strength, I wonder?」

Godhardt embraced Reinhold's neck and forcibly made a toast with him, displaying his well-developed biceps with the other party's slender arms.

「Don't mind it. Even if you have no physical strength, you have still put your guild in order. You're doing well so far.」

「Ri-right...」

Reinhold gave an unconvinced sigh and sipped his lager while picking up a piece of the karaage when the next plate arrived. It was a small bowl. There was some kind of stalk garnish, and part of the base was sitting on the plate, small and quietly. It seemed like it would be better to serve it in a big bowl rather than in a pretentious bowl like this.

「The last dish is takowasa. It is a little spicy, so please eat bit by bit.」

Takowasa



‘I see.’ Godhardt made a small sigh.

The sashimi and karaage built up a mood for the next coming dish, but when it finally came, it was somewhat of a wet blanket.

However, since it was Taisho, he might have some plan.

For example, this dish might make him completely sober up if he took a bite.

When he thought about it that way, he felt somewhat thankful.

Taisho said he should eat it little by little, it was probably just something like a warning.

Godhardt daringly picked up a handful of takowasa.

Even though Shinobu saw it and tried to stop him, it was already too late.

He threw it into his mouth immediately.

Pain.

The next moment, a pain that he had never felt before ran from the middle of his forehead to the bridge of his nose.

He washed it down with the lager while closing his eyes involuntarily.

What on Earth was that? Rather than spicy, it was painful.

However, it was by no means an unpleasant sensation.

The remaining takowasa was chewed properly. The chewy texture of the sashimi remained intact, but the invigorating, sharp taste, which was neither salt nor spices, produced an exquisite flavour.

(TL note: yep, it's wasabi. Takowasa = tako (octopus) + wasabi)

「Are, are you okay? Eating that much at once...」

Instead of answering Shinobu and Reinhold, who looked anxious, Godhardt threw another mouthful of takowasa into his mouth. However, it was a proper mouthful this time.

Then, the lager.

Delicious.

It was truly delicious.

「Reinhold-san.」

「Y, yes.」

He grasped both of Reinhold's hands, who was sitting with his spine straightened.

「I agree to the matter of investment. Let's sell octopuses, so I can eat octopus in the Old Capital at any time.」

「Yes!」

Godhardt made another toast to Reinhold, who was nodding strongly. It felt like it had been a long time since he had drank such delicious alcohol.